Commuting to Silicon Valley

Prepared by Chuck Purvis, Metropolitan Transportation Commission, March 21, 2003

The number of workers commuting to jobs in Santa Clara County increased by 9.1 percent between 1990 and 2000, from about 857 thousand in 1990 to 935 thousand workers per day in 2000. This is less than half the growth that occurred in Santa Clara County between 1980 and 1990, where the county added 174 thousand additional workers (+25.5%, 1980 to 1990).

Commuting to Santa Clara County – Silicon Valley – showed significant increases from all points of the compass between 1990 and 2000. The commute from the East Bay to Santa Clara has more than tripled over twenty years, from 31 thousand to nearly 95 thousand daily commuters. The commute from down the peninsula has nearly doubled over twenty years, increasing from 38 thousand commuters in 1980 to nearly 74 thousand commuters in 2000.

Commuting from homes outside the Bay Area to jobs in Santa Clara County has taken off in the past twenty years. The traditionally largest in-commute from neighboring counties to the Bay Area is from Santa Cruz to Santa Clara. The number of commuters from Santa Cruz-to-Santa Clara has steadily increased from 12.9 thousand commuters in 1980, to 17.6 thousand commuters in 1990, to 21.5 thousand daily commuters in 2000. Santa Cruz to Santa Clara commuters typically commute "over the hill" over California route 17 and to a lesser extent California route 152 (Hecker Pass).

Commuting from San Benito and Monterey Counties to Santa Clara is one of the fastest growing commute markets. This commute, typically via US-101 from Hollister through Gilroy, has increased from 6,200 commuters in 1990 to 13,900 commuters in 2000, a more than doubling over just ten years.

The Merced County (Los Banos, Merced) to Santa Clara commute is the fastest growing inter-regional commute market in the Bay Area, in terms of percent change, 1990 to 2000. Most of this is probably via route 152 (Pacheco Pass) though some of these commuters may be entering through Altamont Pass and Sunol grade.

Another significant long distance commute market is the commute from San Joaquin and Stanislaus Counties via Altamont Pass (I-580) and Sunol Grade (I-680). The number of commuters from San Joaquin and Stanislaus to Santa Clara increased 56 percent between 1990 and 2000, from 7.0 thousand to 10.9 thousand daily commuters.

It is important to note that a large majority of jobs in Santa Clara County are held by residents of Santa Clara. In 1980, 87.5 percent of Santa Clara jobs were held by Santa Clara County resident workers. By 2000 this share decreased to 77.8 percent of Santa Clara County jobs held by Santa Clara County resident workers. Still, the absolute number of workers living-and-working in Santa Clara County is by far the largest commute market in Silicon Valley, increasing from nearly 600 thousand commuters in 1980 to nearly 728 thousand commuters in 2000.

Interestingly enough the "reverse commute" – from Santa Clara County households to jobs outside Santa Clara – has steadily increased over the decades, from 49 thousand Santa Clara out-commuters in 1980 to 97 thousand Santa Clara out-commuters in 2000. The out-commute is nearly evenly split between Santa Clarans working in San Mateo County (40.7 thousand in 2000) and Alameda County (37.0 thousand in 2000).

Total Workers Commuting to Jobs in Santa Clara County, 1980-2000

				Absolute	Percent
Commuter	Total Workers,	Total Workers,	Total Workers,	Change, 1990-	Change, 1990-
Origin (Home)	1980	1990	2000	2000	2000
Santa Clara	597,800	710,600	727,900	17,300	+2.4%
Peninsula	38,100	53,000	73,700	20,700	+39.1%
East Bay	31,400	68,700	94,800	26,100	+38.0%
Pacheco Pass	100	700	3,450	2,750	+405.7%
Monterey Bay	15,300	23,800	35,400	11,600	+48.7%
Total	682,800	856,900	935,300	78,400	+9.1%

Table 2
Total Workers Commuting to Jobs in Santa Clara County, 1980-2000 (County Details)

Commuter	Total Workers,	Total Workers,	Total Workers,	Absolute Change, 1990-	Percent Change, 1990-
Origin (Home)	1980	1990	2000	2000	2000
Santa Clara	597,764	710,582	727,915	17,333	2.4%
San Francisco	3,721	7,992	15,868	7,876	98.5%
San Mateo	33,853	44,001	55,473	11,472	26.1%
Sonoma	100	388	1,246	858	221.1%
Marin	400	564	952	388	68.8%
Mendocino	0	22	30	8	36.4%
Lake	57	69	144	75	108.7%
Peninsula	38,131	53,036	73,713	20,677	39.0%
Alameda	27,474	53,139	69,669	16,530	31.1%
Contra Costa	2,389	6,010	10,145	4,135	68.8%
Solano	252	1,000	1,605	605	60.5%
Napa	95	103	365	262	254.4%
Colusa	10	0	0	0	0.0%
Yolo	119	121	142	21	17.4%
Sacramento	412	1,162	1,486	324	27.9%
Placer	44	226	522	296	131.0%
San Joaquin	366	3,380	7,046	3,666	108.5%
Stanislaus	245	3,605	3,822	217	6.0%
East Bay	31,406	68,746	94,802	26,056	37.9%
Merced	144	682	3,449	2,767	405.7%
Pacheco Pass	144	682	3,449	2,767	405.7%
San Benito	1,340	3,767	8,054	4,287	113.8%
Monterey	1,089	2,402	5,799	3,397	141.4%
Santa Cruz	12,919	17,645	21,540	3,895	22.1%
Monterey Bay	15,348	23,814	35,393	11,579	48.6%
Total	682,793	856,860	935,272	78,412	9.2%